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CBS producer defends documentary

J By David Zucchini
 Inquirer Staff Writer

NEW YORK — In 1967, the CIA and the military argued over how to count the enemy in Vietnam. That intelligence dispute was the focus of a 1982 CBS documentary that is now the subject of a libel suit.

In federal court yesterday, two radically different versions of the debate were presented as George Crile, the producer of the documentary, defended his preparation of it. Crile contended that Gen. William C. Westmoreland was neither "candid" nor "forthcoming" in a May 1981 interview with CBS.

Crile is a defendant in the trial of Westmoreland's \$120 million libel suit against CBS.

The differing views of the intelligence debate — the view held by Westmoreland and the one held by CBS — were crystallized most clearly yesterday when Crile was reminded that an attorney for Westmoreland had compared the intelligence debate in court last week to a "disagreement over which football team is going to win the Super Bowl."

When asked by CBS attorney David Boles to repeat the words CIA and military intelligence analysts had used in interviews to describe the nature of the debate, Crile slowly repeated the words "dishonest," "misleading," "prostitution" and "mistake of the century."

Westmoreland has testified that the discrepancies between estimates of the enemy put out by his command and those advocated by the CIA resulted from an "honest debate" over methodology and the nature of the enemy. The CIA estimated total enemy strength at more than 500,000, almost double the 298,000 reported by Westmoreland's command.

Yesterday, sections of the documentary were played for the jury as Boles questioned Crile point-by-point about its allegations against Westmoreland.

Crile defended each one, referring repeatedly to the "cumulative impact" of the 80 interviews he has said

he conducted with former intelligence analysts and other Vietnam-era officials. Those interviews, he said, convinced him of the truth of the allegations made in the broadcast.

Boles used the point-by-point analysis of the broadcast to explore Crile's state of mind in preparing the program. As a former public official, Westmoreland must prove that CBS either knew the broadcast was false or recklessly disregarded whether it was true or false.

In unused portions of his videotaped interview with CBS shown yesterday, Westmoreland dismissed the intelligence debate as "a rather absurd argument that didn't last very long."

Asked whether he believed at the time that Westmoreland was telling the truth, Crile replied quickly: "No."

He added: "It was a very long and very bitter battle." The general, Crile said, "was not being forthright and straight with us."

In addition, he said, the general's statements "were completely contradictory. They flew in the face of what General Westmoreland's own intelligence officers ... had told us."

In addition to interviewing military and CIA analysts involved in the dispute, Crile said, CBS also talked to participants from the Defense Intelligence Agency and from the headquarters of Westmoreland's military superiors.

"This was not a story that relied on one or two sources," he said.

Referring to an interview with one CIA analyst, he said, he considered it "one of the many confirming pieces of evidence that added up to a

scream from the CIA people that something wrong had taken place."

Crile also pointed out that Westmoreland, in the interview, did not directly deny blocking a May 1967 report that showed almost a doubling in the size of enemy irregulars, known as "self-defense forces." The report was presented to him by his intelligence chief, Gen. Joseph McChristian, who testified Wednesday that Westmoreland had suppressed it for political reasons.

Later, Boles sought to discredit Gen. Daniel Graham, an important witness for Westmoreland, by showing unused portions of a CBS interview in which Graham repeatedly said that enemy irregulars were never included in official reports issued by Westmoreland's command. Evidence at the trial has shown that the

forces were included in the reports from the time U.S. forces first arrived in Vietnam in the early 1960s until Westmoreland ordered them dropped in late 1967.

Graham also said in the interview that McChristian did not favor inclusion of the forces in the reports. McChristian has testified emphatically that he did favor their inclusion.

Graham also said former CIA analyst Samuel A. Adams, a CBS consultant, was the only CIA member to disagree with Westmoreland's estimates. Several former CIA officials have testified that they disagreed bitterly with Westmoreland's estimates.

Crile said the interview convinced him that Graham was "not credible in any way, shape or form."